

“I Get No Respect”
Malachi 1:1-6b

Aretha Franklin sang about it. Our parents expected it of us. You expect it of your children. Certain positions require it. The bully demands it. It takes a lifetime to maintain and mere seconds to lose. What is it? RESPECT. It means: consideration, to esteem, to relate to, to honor. All any of us want is a little RESPECT. Rodney Daingerfield (a comedian from the early boomer generation) whined about how he was supposedly treated by his wife, mother-in-law, children, or the public, “I’m telling ya, I git no respect.” You laugh and almost have pity for the man if you thought he deserved any.

There is One who deserves respect, always at all times. Sadly, he often receives it the least from those who ought to respect him the most. In fact, he often receives more respect from those who openly state they are his enemies than from those who claim to be his closest friends. That One who deserves respect is the very One we came to worship this morning. And, yes, we are those who frequently fail to respect God most, especially when things seem to be going good, whether in our personal life, our family, our jobs, or even our church.

Most of life is not lived in the extremes of elation or crisis – which is a good thing. Not many of us would be able to handle a life of perpetual ecstasy and mountain-top euphoria, nor of pain or loss, or even continuous challenge. But crisis and elation do have this: almost always God and our relationship with God are on the front page.

But when things are “normal,” in-the-mean-time, between crises and miracles, God tends to be pushed to the margins of our lives and we become preoccupied with ourselves. Worship of God slips to the place of a diversion or a mere hobby. We are prone to go about our usual activities as if God were not involved in such daily-ness. And we disregard what God has to say about our everyday activities and lives.

The prophecy of Malachi was written for just such conditions to the nation of Israel. Israel was a people God had raised up to be a nation like no other nation, a nation whose God was the Lord, a nation established to show all the other peoples of the earth how to live in relationship with God. But time and time again Israel turned away from God; and time and time again God sent prophets to convince them to repent and turn back to God. Finally, after giving plethora opportunities, God gave them the consequence he said would happen in Deuteronomy 28; the nation was driven into exile. After seventy years in exile, God returned them to their homeland; they were a nation once again.

The people of Israel had gone from oppression to euphoria. They rebuilt the Temple and they rebuilt Jerusalem. Spirits were high as the people confessed their sin and recommitted their allegiance to God. There was even the expectation that God would bless them and make them the world power they once had been under David and Solomon. However, this was not God's plan. God was instead preparing them and the world for something better, the coming of Jesus.

After many years, the joys of returning faded. It's not that life was bad; in fact, it was pretty good. They kept their religion. But they lost contact with the God of their religion. The people of Israel became lukewarm in their relationship with God, and their actions and complaints showed it. So God sent Malachi to tell them, "I love you" (**Read Text Here**).

Father God, missing the quality time, the intimate relational interaction with his children, says, "I love you." But the people respond, "How? How have you loved us? We thought you were going to be our God and make us the nation we once were, when David was king and we were the center of the world. What have you done to show us your love lately?"

Be careful, now. We Christians can be guilty of the same thing. God brings us out of the bondage of sin to the promised land of salvation and restored relationship with God made

possible by the love and sacrifice of Jesus. God says, “I will be your God,” and we enthusiastically accept, “We will be your people.” We are on top of the mountain. We commit to worshipping God and growing in faith. Our hearts literally become temples of praise. At times we’ve weathered some rough, even down right treacherous, road. Our faith faltered a little, but when we reached out for God, God brought us through. Again, things are good. When things are good, we begin to dream and plan about what God ought to do in and through us. After all, our God loves us so surely he would prosper us, of course he would want our church to grow, and therefore God will do some awesome and fantastic things so that we would be recognized as God’s special people. But things don’t go quite as WE think they should. Soon, the enthusiasm fades.

Do you see where this scenario is going? So often we are like the Israelites Malachi is sent to. Our expectation of who God is and what God does clouds our minds and our hearts. When God does not do *as we think* he ought or *when we think* he ought, we begin to question God’s love for us. Worse than that, while we don’t reject God, we aren’t really worshipping or serving and we have no thought about obeying. We’re just going through the motions.

God comes to us and says, “I love you.” And because things aren’t going our way we holler back, “Oh, Yeah? How? We look around us and it seems you love everyone else. They are the ones with power, the ones with position, the ones who seem to have whatever they want. They get their own way at school, at work, in the community. They don’t seem to care about anyone but themselves. They seem to have it all. And you tell us you love us.”

To the Israelites God responded, “Remember Jacob and Esau? I chose you; you I blessed; you I preserved even through the exile; you have a relationship with me; and yes, through you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. But the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, it only

looks like they are going places. Oh, they will try to rebuild, but they will become a wasteland; soon they will be no more.” And the land of the Edomites is a wasteland to this day.

God says something similar to us today, “Remember Adam and Satan? Adam I loved, but Satan I hated. Remember man was not the only creation to rebel against Me. Satan and his angels now demons did, too. **I chose Adam; I chose you.** I brought you back from exile in sin to a restored relationship with me. When Jesus died on the cross and removed the curse of sin, Satan and his band lost. And even though he tries again and again to rebuild his empire, Satan will not succeed; he will be destroyed and his empire will be a wasteland forever.”

God reminds us that He didn't have to choose us; but he did. He didn't have to save us; but he did. He doesn't have to love us; but he does. With that reminder, the questions of God are appropriate, “If I am a Father, where is the honor due me? If I am Master, where is the respect due me?” When we act as if God has to constantly prove how much he loves us by doing what *we* think he ought to do then our love is no longer a love of God but a love of what God does. That's not love; that's abuse. What if God chose to act with us the way we often act towards Him? What If

God didn't take the time to bless us today because we couldn't take the time to thank him yesterday?

God decided to stop leading us tomorrow because we didn't follow him today?

We never saw another flower bloom because we grumbled when God sent us rain?

God didn't walk with us today because we failed to recognize it as His day?

God took away the Bible tomorrow because we would not read it today?

God took away His messenger because we failed to listen to the message?

God didn't send His only begotten Son because He wanted us to pay the price for sin?

The door of the church was closed because we did not open the door of our heart?

God stopped loving and caring for us because we failed to love and care for others?

God would not hear us today because we would not listen to Him?

God answered our prayers the way we answer His call to service?

God met our needs the way we give Him our lives???

When life becomes “normal” we become complacent and, even though we may not intend to, our reverence for and honor of God easily diminishes. In the coming weeks, Malachi

will wake us up to the crisis of God during times when the only thing we are concerned with is us. He'll keep us alert, listening for God, waiting in anticipation for God, ready to respond to God, who is always coming to us to tell us, "I love you." Let's concentrate our attention *not* on what God can do for us, but on God and his character, responding to his love for us in such a way that he receives the honor and respect that is due him.